



The Youth Family Team Meeting Process

A Step-By-Step Guide to Implementaion

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Overview

There is no denying that family court can be a frustrating place to work. It often feels as though every option has been given to a child to no avail. With every budget crisis, another program designed to help children disappears. Court workers are often left without other options or with the feeling that the existing options will not address the cause of a youth's negative behavior. The Youth Family Team Meeting (YFTM) offers a low-cost intervention to address the actual causes of misbehavior, while including the family in the process of inventing new, innovative service plans that use community resources.

A YFTM brings together the youth, his or her family, service providers, and other significant people in the youth's life to call attention to the youth's strengths, identify his or her needs, and develop an innovative plan to address those needs. It differs from other models because it does not highlight a youth's misbehavior. The YFTM focuses on how the community can work together to build on the youth's strengths by designing services specifically to meet the youth's unique needs, not one-size-fits-all interventions.

This publication will aid agencies and organizations in implementing the YFTM concept to help system-involved youth and families use existing community resources for service plans. It is a step-by-step guide intended to support agencies and organizations implementing the concept.



Step 1: Understanding How the YFTM Works

The philosophy behind the YFTM is simple: Every child has strengths and needs. Some youth attempt to meet these needs through positive behaviors. Others may turn to negative behaviors. Youth attempting to meet their needs through negative behaviors will continue to do so unless they are actively supported in pursuing satisfying alternatives that build on their strengths. Traditionally, service planning has focused on the misbehavior of the youth and failures of the family, leaving both feeling alienated and unable to improve.

The YFTM focuses instead on the strengths of the youth and the family, how best to foster and apply those strengths, and understanding the underlying need the youth is trying to meet through negative behaviors. A successful YFTM leaves the youth and family feeling empowered, heard, and invested in the change process. The YFTM approach encourages active involvement of the youth in the meeting so that he or she has ownership of the resulting plan. The family should encourage the youth to voice his or her thoughts and also provide contributions to the resulting service plan. During a successful YFTM, the underlying needs driving the delinquent behavior are patiently drawn out of the youth and family with professionals contributing. For each of these needs, the question is asked, “What would it take to meet this need?” Services and supports that are tailored to meet each need – and can be provided by the family – are designed by the team.

YFTM Components

Identifying Strengths

- The YFTM begins with identifying the youth’s strengths. It starts with the perspective of the youth, followed by input from the family and other YFTM participants. Strengths can be broad and vary according to the youth. Some are skills, like playing basketball or reading. Others are actions, such as making good grades or helping around the house. Other strengths are characteristics, such as leadership, honesty, or loyalty. The goal is to identify functional strengths that can be built on by supports and services. Beginning the meeting with strengths, rather than family history or

bureaucratic details, allows the young person and family to feel recognized for the good things about them.

- Beginning by identifying strengths ensures that the resulting plan is designed to enhance the youth's and family's strengths. This approach also helps ensure the young person's continued participation and buy-in during the meeting. Many youth who participate in a YFTM are not new to meetings with school officials or mental health professionals. Chances are they have felt alienated from the process during such meetings. Young people's faults tend to be on display and the adults in the room appear to be talking down to them. Beginning with strengths safeguards against this pitfall. A focus on deficits can alienate the family from the process as well. Focusing on strengths appreciates the family and their important role in supporting their child.
- The strengths the team agrees on are written down and displayed during the meeting so they can be drawn upon throughout the YFTM process. Building on these strengths is the foundation of the YFTM meeting and process.

Identifying Needs

- This phase of the YFTM involves a careful assessment of the unique factors behind the youth's behavior, including immaturity, disabilities, and trauma. The assessment does not include mental health or special education jargon or diagnostic terminology. This approach is to help ensure the family and youth are better able to participate in the process. The youth is asked to explain the needs he or she is trying to meet through the negative behavior. The youth should be allowed to explain without fear of judgment or reproach.
- The underlying needs behind a youth's behavior can be challenging to identify. The members of the team may have different ideas about the underlying needs. Some may feel it is urgent that a behavior stop and may not have considered why the youth engages in the behavior.
- The YFTM process resists the traditional model of prescribing clinical services as needs. For example, for a youth who smokes marijuana, the tendency is to say, "She needs a substance abuse program." But this service may not meet the youth's underlying need. Perhaps the root of the issue lies in depression over a recent loss or anxiety due to a familial issue. In either of these situations, substance abuse counseling will not be an effective service for the youth.
- The YFTM facilitator helps the team members to resist prescribing services to change a behavior. The facilitator helps the team to work together on a clear statement of the underlying need driving the behavior. The identified needs should be simple, clear, and derived from the youth and family's discussion. Planning services and supports should be delayed until the third part of the meeting.
- It is crucial that the youth be involved in articulating needs. Careful preparation (described below) will help the youth to speak up without fear of judgment or reproach. If youth do not want what adults think they need, change is unlikely. The facilitator helps team members avoid stating adult imperatives (such as obeying rules) as needs since they are not perceived that way by youth. For example, if a young person does not attend class because of boredom, meeting the need for more stimulating classes requires different services than those for a youth skipping class to avoid bullying classmates.
- The needs phase of the YFTM tends to be the longest and, in some respects, the most difficult. The facilitator and YFTM participants trained in the process will have to steer others away from the urge to use special education and mental health jargon. The facilitator will work to engage the youth while ensuring that the adults do not overpower the youth's voice. It is unrealistic to discuss all aspects of the youth's life. The process should produce three or four simply stated, specific underlying needs. Participants wanting a prioritized or complete list can be reassured that needs will be added or refined later.

Identifying services and supports

- The third phase of a YFTM involves formulating a plan that builds on the youth's strengths and meets each of the needs identified during the meeting. The service plan will list each service and

support to be provided to the youth and the person responsible for implementing the service. Ideally, the YFTM participants are integral parts of the implementation process. Each participant must understand his or her role in meeting the youth's needs and supporting the family in meeting those needs.

- This plan is unlike other treatment planning because it does not jump to program assignment. For example, a youth does not *need* counseling. He or she may need to learn how to express his or her feelings or need help working through a traumatic event. Those needs are not always necessarily met through counseling. They could be met through other community-based activities. Participants are encouraged to be creative and come up with new ways to meet needs. Efforts by family members and others close to the youth could potentially meet the needs identified during the YFTM. For example, a youth who has identified the need to be calm and think before expressing anger may be served by taking time with a family member, teacher, coach, or pastor to talk regularly about his or her feelings when potential disagreements arise.

A case scenario and template service plan are on page 18 of the Appendix.

Several jurisdictions across the country have employed the YFTM process or some variation of the process. Except for the District of Columbia, most jurisdictions use YFTMs in their child welfare or mental health service systems. Their practices and requirements, therefore, may differ from YFTMs in the juvenile justice context. Nevertheless, understanding the practices is useful. Below is a list of resources from jurisdictions employing the approach.

- District of Columbia, Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services, "DC Youth Link," http://dyrs.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dyrs/publication/attachments/DC%20YouthLinkWhitePaper_%20FINAL.pdf
- State of Tennessee, Department of Children's Services, "Stages of the Child and Family Team Meeting," Policy Attachment: 31.7, www.state.tn.us/youth/dcsguide/policies/chap31/31.7Att.pdf, January 15, 2010.
- Arizona Department of Health Services, Division of Behavioral Health Services Practice Protocol: Child and Family Team Practice, www.azdhs.gov/bhs/guidance/cft.pdf, August 15, 2009.
- Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Policy 2440 Family Team Meetings, http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/CPS/Files/CPS_pg_2440.asp, November 2009.
- Nevada Case Planning and Assessment Policies, Clark County Department of Family Services, Child and Family Team Meetings Presentation, www.childwelfare.gov/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/soctoolkits/resources/NV_CaseManagementTrainingFacilitator.pdf, April 26, 2013.
- North Carolina Division of Social Services, Family Services Manual, Volume I: Children's Services, Chapter VII: Child and Family Team Meetings, info.dhhs.state.nc.us/olm/manuals/dss/csm-55/man/CSVII.pdf, February 2009.
- Indiana Department of Child Services, The Child and Family Team Meeting and the Child and Family Team, <http://www.in.gov/dcs/2925.htm>, April 26, 2013.

Step 2: Choosing the Unit or Division to Implement the YFTM Process

The YFTM process can be helpful in many settings in which children exhibit negative behaviors. The only requirement for a YFTM is a willingness to focus on strengths, an understanding of needs, and a commitment to try a new, innovative service plan. When deciding the appropriate unit or division within an agency or organization to implement the YFTM process, organizations should consider several factors.

Identifying the Appropriate Division or Unit for Implementation

YFTM implementation requires service providers to evaluate areas in the agency or organization where the most need exists for a process that capitalizes on youth's strengths and draws on community resources. While the YFTM process is an effective tool for most settings, concentrating resources in one unit or division that is receptive to a strengths-based approach may be wise at first. Once the process is mastered in one area, an organization can begin to utilize it as the established approach to service planning.

Determining When the Unit or Division Will Use the Process

Service providers may use the YFTM approach for a variety of purposes. The process may be employed for youth who have just entered the agency or organization as a case planning tool. It also may be used as a re-entry tool for those who are leaving a program. Many jurisdictions convene a YFTM before every advancement a youth makes through a case management plan. The potential uses for the YFTM are varied and depend largely on the needs of the organization and the youth it serves.

Using the Plan

The YFTM process is an effective tool with appropriate buy-in from the youth, family, and YFTM participants. Buy-in is best achieved when resulting services are taken seriously and the agency abides by the YFTM service plan. Otherwise, the YFTM participants and, most importantly the youth, will believe that the process was for naught and that his or her voice was not heard.

When considering YFTM implementation, Jefferson County Juvenile Probation Department in Alabama opted to implement the process in an existing probation unit – the Youth Advocate Program (YAP). The Jefferson County YAP employs a strength-based approach for a caseload of approximately six boys between the ages of 12 and 16 without any serious mental health diagnoses. While YAP used a strength-based approach and the same philosophy of the YFTM, the team had not adopted the YFTM structure. For this reason, the Jefferson County director of probation opted to implement YFTM in that probation unit.



Step 3: Preparing for the YFTM

Agency staff should devote a considerable amount of time ensuring that they have a firm grasp on the YFTM process. Staff should also develop protocols to maximize YFTM benefits and protect youth rights to confidentiality and other relevant privileges. Appropriate protocols on various confidentiality issues will vary between jurisdictions and agencies, but the information below is an adequate starting point.

Ensuring Agency Staff Understand the YFTM Process

Before beginning preparatory work for a YFTM, all agency staff must understand the following:

- The purpose of a YFTM
- The contextual definition of “strengths” and “needs”
- The difference between a YFTM and a service team meeting they may have attended in the past
- The process of a YFTM
- The philosophy behind a YFTM
- How to conduct themselves during a YFTM

A role-playing exercise that aids agency staff in explaining the YFTM process is provided at page 19 of the Appendix. Implementing agencies can learn more about YFTMs from the jurisdictions listed on page 6.

YFTM Confidentiality and Issues of Self-incrimination

The success of a YFTM depends largely on a youth’s willingness to be open and forthright with his or her thoughts. That willingness is best achieved when a youth trusts that he or she will not face penalty for behavior disclosed during the YFTM. It is strongly suggested that implementing agencies establish an official and enforceable policy that prohibits disclosure of information divulged during the YFTM. It should ensure that no information discussed during the YFTM may be used to charge the youth in any juvenile or criminal proceedings.

Typically, neither defense lawyers nor prosecutors attend YFTMs. In the event that a jurisdiction

invites prosecutors to participate in YFTMs, stakeholders should execute an enforceable agreement with the district attorney or prosecutors' office that grants youth immunity for any chargeable activity disclosed during the YFTM or discovered during preparation.

State law may require agencies to secure releases or other confidentiality agreements with YFTM participants, or for youth to give informed consent to participants' attendance in the meeting. Agency staff should identify and execute all required releases and/or agreements before the YFTMs.

Right to Therapist Confidentiality

Licensed counselors or therapists who have worked or are working with a youth may be valuable assets to a YFTM if they have insight into the strengths, needs, and necessary services for youth, and are familiar with the youth. Youth, however, likely have confidentiality rights with these practitioners that only the youth can waive. If a YFTM team decides that the participation of a youth's counselor or therapist in a YFTM will be helpful, the practitioner and the stakeholders must ensure that the youth provides an informed waiver if confidential information is likely to be discussed.

The youth's therapist may be able to help the youth prepare to articulate his or her needs. It is not the intention of the YFTM to delve into the details of the youth's therapy, but to have the therapist's ideas about how the youth's struggles can be translated into needs statements so others can help to meet those needs.

Nevertheless, the practitioner and agency stakeholders must explain to the youth the nature of the right to confidentiality and the consequences of waiving the right in terms he or she can understand. The practitioner should also have the youth and his or her legal representative execute a waiver.

Choosing a Facilitator

The YFTM facilitator should be strengths-oriented and able to help participants with different views reach agreement about the youth's underlying needs. He or she should be capable of creatively tailoring services and supports to meet the youth's needs. The facilitator also must be nonjudgmental and a patient listener prepared to get input from a potentially reserved youth or family member. At the same time, the facilitator must ensure that the adults in the room do not overwhelm the youth with judgment or mental health jargon.

The facilitator is usually the staff member of the implementing agency or organization who is assigned to the youth. However, it may be appropriate for the facilitator to have little or no previous contact with the youth's case to ensure as much neutrality as possible.

In addition to considering the agency role the facilitator plays, implementing agencies and organizations should consider if the facilitator possesses the qualities necessary to lead the YFTM.

The facilitator of the YFTM should be aware of the following:

- The relationship of each person in the YFTM to the youth
- The relationship of each person in the YFTM to the family
- What each person in the room thinks or feels about the youth and his or her behavior
- The history of the youth
- The history of the family

One last consideration is the preparation tasks the facilitator will assume. In the interests of maintaining neutrality and an objective stance, an implementing agency may want to assign the task of interviewing participants to other staff. The staff may prepare a packet of information consisting of interview notes and the youth's relevant records (see below) for the facilitator's review before the YFTM.

Determining Potential YFTM Participants

The identity and number of YFTM participants may vary depending on the youth. When preparing to reach out to potential YFTM participants, staff should look to known information about the young person's positive contacts. This information may be available in the child's case file as a part of intake information. If staff is short on potential participants, the wisest course of action is to begin with the known contacts, such as parents and siblings, and inquire about additional contacts. Asking the youth and family about important individuals in the youth's life, including relatives, a pastor, coaches and others, is important. Potential attendees may include the following:

- Youth
- Family (immediate and extended), friends or members of the community who have a positive relationship with the youth
- School staff, such as teachers, administrators, or coaches
- Youth probation officer and/or case manager
- Youth social worker, counselor or therapist
- Other adults with a positive influence on the youth's life

The number of participants involved in a YFTM is a delicate balance that takes into consideration the need for meaningful input while not overwhelming the youth and family. At a minimum, the young person's parents or legal guardian should attend the YFTM. Parental participation is almost always vital to the success of the YFTM. It helps ensure implementation of the service plan and builds a strong, supportive foundation for the youth.

The youth should be comfortable with the participation of all attendees. This may require more discussion when the staff and the youth, or family members, disagree on a particular attendee.

Preparing the Youth for the YFTM

Before the meeting, the three-part YFTM agenda must be explained to the youth. It also must be explained why having extended family and others at the meeting is important. The youth should be assured that his or her strengths and positive attributes will be the focus of the meeting, rather than his or her behavioral deficits. One way to prepare a young person to speak up at the meeting is to ask in advance what he or she wants and what, specifically, it will take to get it. This can be restated as needs. Some youth may want to write down their needs and discuss them with the interviewer, parents, therapist or other supporter before the YFTM.

The interviewer should then explain what will happen during the YFTM, including the three steps, the seating arrangement, and the individuals who will be present (see **STEP 4: THE YFTM** on page 13).

After ensuring that the youth understands the process, the interviewer should begin a discussion regarding the youth's perceived strengths. This helps the youth become acclimated to the concept before the actual YFTM. The interviewer should attempt to determine if there are unidentified individuals in the young person's life who would have a positive impact on the YFTM.

Finally, the interviewer should talk with the youth about the individuals who will be interviewed in preparation for the YFTM and get the youth's permission to proceed. This step is necessary for

When deciding how to implement the YFTM process, the Tuscaloosa Juvenile Probation Department in Alabama concluded that two juvenile probation officers were to serve as YFTM facilitators. With a staff of eight juvenile probation officers, the Tuscaloosa staff arranged for the two officers to conduct YFTMs for youth not on their caseload in order to maintain as much objectivity as possible.

confidentiality reasons and to ensure that the youth is comfortable during the YFTM. If the youth questions the participation of an individual who the interviewer or other agency staff feel is vital to the YFTM, the interviewer can talk with the youth about why the participant is important to the process. The interviewer should balance, however, the importance of the individual's participation with the discomfort of the youth if the individual is present during the YFTM.

Preparing the Family for the YFTM

Before the YFTM, the family will be informed about the three-part YFTM process and why having extended family and others in the meeting is important. It is also important to help the family members plan how to manage their disappointment in their child or their anger at “the system,” which has failed to provide the help they need. This important preparation can help ensure family members effectively contribute to the needs discussion and the planning of services and supports that will benefit the youth.

Family members may have needs they think should take priority. It is essential to help them understand that the youth's needs will be the focus during the YFTM and the needs of family members will be addressed when supports and services are designed. For example, a parent may say, “I can't do this alone. I can't get him to go to school or come in on time.” In the supports and services discussion, a support for the parent to meet the youth's need might include an intervention such as Multisystemic Therapy or a one-on-one in-home provider who assists the parent in getting the youth to school or at home in time.

Preparing Other YFTM Participants

After securing the youth's and family's permission to talk with potential participants, the staff member may want to prepare a presentation checklist for explaining the YFTM process and a list of interview questions. The checklist may be useful when contacting each potential participant to describe the YFTM process, encourage their contributions and guide their thinking about how to talk about their views of the youth's needs in specific, easily understood ways.

As with the youth interview, the interviewing staff member should begin preparing other potential YFTM participants by explaining the purpose and reasoning behind the YFTM process, emphasizing that this is a strengths-based approach that is different than other case management approaches. After explaining the YFTM concept, the interviewer should attempt to procure information from the interviewee that would be helpful in the YFTM, including the youth's strengths and needs.

If a mental health or educational assessment has been completed before the YFTM, it is important that a participant be prepared to translate diagnoses and disabilities into needs that others can understand. This person must be asked to prepare understandable explanations of assessment findings before the needs discussion.

A YFTM Explanation Checklist is provided on page 23 of the Appendix.

YFTM Preparation Materials or Report

Staff designated to interview the YFTM participants should prepare materials or, even better, a report before the YFTM in time for the

While preparing a youth for a YFTM at the Tuscaloosa Family Court, staff learned that the youth has a love for basketball and plays on her high school team. After speaking with the coach, the staff learned that the youngster and the coach have a positive relationship and he is invested in her future success. At the last minute, the staff arranged for the coach to participate in the YFTM. As a part of the service plan, he agreed to have weekly talks with the young woman to help her deal with the emotional turmoil affecting her school participation.

facilitator's review. Implementing agencies or organizations should require this report to keep a clear record of the process, even if the facilitator conducts participant interviews or other preparation-related tasks.

The report could include youth records, such as intake notes, social summaries, needs or risk assessments, and a history of the youth's court and dependency involvement. Staff should take care that all applicable releases and/or confidentiality agreements are properly executed before providing the facilitator with youth records. It may be appropriate to summarize some records given the potential length juvenile records may span. For example, the preparing staff member may be able to summarize a youth's prior court involvement in a shorter document compared to a report. Moreover, the summary of a needs assessment may be more appropriate to provide to the facilitator rather than the entire assessment.

A template report with a list of juvenile record attachments is provided at page 24 of the Appendix.

A YFTM Preparation Checklist is provided on page 24 of the Appendix.



Step 4: The YFTM

Attendees should be aware that the YFTM is different than other team meetings. The youth and his or her family should be made to feel comfortable. All participants should be reminded throughout the YFTM of the purpose and process of the meeting.

Participants should be prepared for the youth to discuss things he or she may not have discussed before or to share things he or she may find difficult to share. Everyone in attendance should be sensitive to the youth and family, including the fact that they have opened up so much of their lives. They should be thanked for their willingness to participate and their input welcomed at each point of the process.

There is no preset manner for the mechanics of setting up a YFTM, but some tips are offered below:

YFTM Location and Timing

A YFTM should take place in a setting most convenient to the youth and the youth's family. Staff should consider if holding the YFTM in an agency or business office is intimidating to the youth. If so, the staff can be creative about selecting the location, considering settings such as a community center, local church, or school, while still taking into account the importance of confidentiality.

The YFTM should be on a day and time that will ensure the attendance of most of the YFTM participants. For example, if the participation of a youth's teacher or coach would be helpful, staff should consider holding the YFTM after school hours or on a Saturday so that the teacher or coach can attend.

Once the location and time of the YFTM are agreed upon, it may be useful to create an email group that includes all participants. This will allow for easy distribution of information before and after the YFTM. Participants without email access will need to be contacted by phone.

Room Setup

The ideal room for the YFTM should be large enough for all the participants to move freely. There should be enough space for the facilitator to take notes to craft a service plan where all participants can see them. It is best for all participants to sit around the same table without one having more prominence than another. It is important to seat the youth in a place where he or she does not feel trapped.

Ground Rules

It is important to start the YFTM with strengths and avoid beginning with history or bureaucratic details. The facilitator must remember that families may have experienced situations where a professional has managed meetings with goals and rules that not only prevented the meeting from starting with a discussion of the good aspects of the youth and family, but left them feeling less than welcome.

The meeting can move immediately to strengths after the facilitator opens with brief introductions and outlines the three-part meeting agenda. Some team meetings get stuck on lengthy initial discussion of ground rules, which can be alienating for families. If necessary, it is preferable for the facilitator to insert ideas – such as “Let’s talk one at a time and not interrupt each other” – rather than provide a long discussion of ground rules.

YFTM Flow

Though there is no set amount of time that the first YFTM should take, most cannot be completed in less than 90 minutes. The facilitator can choose how much time to spend on each part of the three parts of the meeting. Many facilitators find, however, that the needs section requires the longest amount of time to complete.

The most difficult aspect of the YFTM is adhering to its format: identifying strengths, identifying needs, and identifying services and supports. Participants may be impatient with the slow process. The discussion of needs is so unfamiliar, participants may jump to services instead of continuing to work on needs.

It is helpful to write the responses of the group to strengths, needs, services and supports on a large piece of paper so they can be referred to throughout the process, especially when it comes to identifying services and supports, as each service or support should meet a stated strength and enhance a stated strength.

YFTMs can move quickly with everyone participating in the process and the facilitator guiding each task. On the other hand, the process can move slowly with few participants speaking and the facilitator redirecting if the participants stray from the strengths focus and the importance of generating specific needs before moving on to services and supports.

Generally, by the time a youth has come to a YFTM, service providers and families are used to focusing on the negative behaviors the youth has exhibited. It can take some time to draw strengths and needs out of the participants because they are not used to thinking in this way. Sometimes, a facilitator must be patient and wait for a participant to talk. Being uncomfortable with silence and moving too quickly can lead to strengths and other important information being overlooked.

The facilitator is best suited to decide how to proceed. As long as the three components are completed, it is up to the facilitator to decide how long the YFTM will last and how to navigate difficult situations.

Facilitator Practice Tips

There are three important things to remember when facilitating a YFTM:

- The importance of neutrality
- The strengths-based focus
- To be comfortable with silence

Neutrality during a Youth Family Team Meeting is essential to identifying strengths, needs, and services and supports. The youth and family coming into a YFTM have likely been through a number of service team meetings and various interventions. They will probably feel uncomfortable at first. It is important to include them in the process and demonstrate that their opinions and feelings are heard and taken into account throughout the meeting.

A facilitator may find it challenging to write the strengths, needs and services and supports in terms that the youth and family understand. When a participant proposes a need, it is up to the facilitator to ask other's views, encourage more specificity, and propose wording with less jargon. The result may be needs statements that do not resemble a traditional service plan created by a professional.

For example, the youth may complain that his father acts like his friends are “criminals” and wants him to “stay in the house 24-7.” The father may counter by saying, “Every time you get in trouble, it’s with those friends. You need to stay away from negative influences.” The youth’s therapist may say the youth needs “pro-social peers.”

It’s the facilitator’s job to put these responses into words everyone can understand. Before writing, the facilitator might ask the youth and his father, “What would you think of ‘He needs time with friends who go to school and do positive things like play on the team with him’?”

A strengths-based focus is what distinguishes a YFTM from other service team meetings. Rather than trying to build from the ground up, a YFTM builds on what already exists. If the facilitator forgets the strengths-based focus, the task of conducting the YFTM becomes insurmountable and the youth is alienated again as his or her faults are cataloged.

YFTMs are sometimes difficult to conduct. Generally, by the time a youth has come to a YFTM, service providers and families are accustomed to focusing on the negative behaviors the youth has exhibited. It can take some time to draw strengths and needs out of the participants because they are not used to thinking in this way. Sometimes, a facilitator must be patient and wait for a participant to talk. Being uncomfortable with silence and moving along quickly can lead to missing important pieces of information or strengths.

A successful YFTM may yield information about the young person the staff and the people closest to the youngster may not have realized. During one YFTM, the facilitator discovered that the youth’s speech impediment contributes to feelings of nervousness and a poor showing at school. This occurred after she listened intently to the youth and encouraged the youth to lead the discussion on strengths and needs. The facilitator explored this issue with the youth during the YFTM and worked with family court staff to arrange for a speech and language assessment as a service, knowing that speech impairment is often connected to significant undiagnosed problems affecting receiving and expressing ideas. Without the YFTM approach – exploring the underlying reasons for negative behavior – the family court staff may not have realized the connection between the speech impediment and the youth’s activity.



Step 5: Follow-Up Work

The best way to ensure that a YFTM will be a useful and successful meeting for the youth, family, and service providers is to craft a specific, implementable plan that is designed to enhance the youth's strengths and meet the needs of the youth. The plan should have the dates and names of those responsible for completing tasks. After the YFTM, the facilitator will transfer the strengths, needs and supports and services from the big sheet of paper to a simply formatted plan on a single sheet. It should be provided to the participants by email or other means.

The initial YFTM will produce a plan that may involve considerable follow-up work to get unconventional, tailored services and supports into place. For example, rather than meeting a need through a referral to an existing tutoring or mentoring program, the plan may call for a particular individual to work one-on-one with the youth. The plan should designate the individuals who will set up these services and supports.

After the YFTM, the person assigned to the youth will stay in contact with each individual with a follow-up responsibility. This helps ensure that services and supports are put into place. Participants should be kept updated via email. At some point, a follow-up YFTM might be useful to refine the needs and improve the services. This may occur in 30 or 60 days. It may occur even sooner if there are obstacles to implementing the plan's services and supports.

For agencies or organizations that offer case management services, case managers can oversee the process of follow-up and ensure that the service plan crafted during the meeting is being used. A case manager can also continue to facilitate communication between team members. Juvenile probation officers may act in the same role.

For those agencies that opt not to establish when the next YFTM will occur or not to incorporate the YFTM process into an existing program, the success of follow-up will depend on a structured and precise service plan.

Conclusion

This publication is meant to be a guide for agencies and organizations that wish to use the YFTM method. Implementing groups are encouraged to do additional research and reach out to jurisdictions and organizations for technical assistance. YFTMs are a powerful tool for youth and families. When used properly, the YFTM process can be an effective means of addressing youth behavior and using community resources.

Appendix

Step 1: Understanding How the YFTM Works

Case Scenario

Andrew is a 16-year-old boy on juvenile probation. He was arrested for first-degree burglary and spent 30 days in detention before he was released on probation. Andrew has violated probation once and is generally uncooperative with any other services. He smokes marijuana weekly and rarely follows his parents' rules.

Andrew has all but checked out of most of his classes, except for math. Andrew excels in math and sees his teacher, Mr. Farmer, as an adult he can trust. Andrew's teachers say that he is intelligent and would succeed if he applied himself. Outside of school, Andrew spends much of his time with a group of friends. His parents think they are bad influences Andrew should avoid. Andrew often initiates the negative behaviors they engage in.

Andrew lives with his mother, stepfather, and two younger half-brothers. Both of his parents work full time and overtime when they can get the hours. Andrew's half-brothers are the product of his mother's second marriage to his stepfather. He rarely sees his father, but has two more half-siblings from his father's second marriage. All of Andrew's half-siblings are under the age of 5.

There is a lot of conflict between Andrew and his mother and stepfather. There are frequent arguments. Andrew once pushed his stepfather during a yelling match. No charges were filed, but Andrew and his stepfather have barely spoken since. The fights between Andrew and his stepfather have left his mother feeling trapped. Andrew says that she takes his stepfather's side. Andrew will often happily take care of his little brothers. He enjoys spending time with them. It's clear that his little brothers love their older brother as well.

Andrew has been in individual and group therapy. He has no mental health diagnoses. His probation officer is at the end of his rope and does not know how to get through to Andrew.

Service Plan Template

Andrew's strengths	Andrew's needs	Services and Supports
Good at caring for his little brothers	For Andrew's mother to spend more time with him	Andrew and his mother will spend two hours un-interrupted together each week
Good at math	To apply his intelligence to his school work	Andrew and his parents will sit down to talk twice weekly about his school work and how he is feeling
Able to express his feelings in a group of adults	To understand his leadership skills	
Leadership	To feel heard in his home	Andrew and Mr. Farmer will speak together with each of Andrew's teachers about how he can improve his grades

Step 2: Preparing for the YFTM

Role-Play Exercise for Preparing for YFTM

Split those prepping for the YFTM into groups of two. One person will play the YFTM participant and the others will play themselves. Practice explaining the process to the participant and gaining buy-in. Switch places so both people get the chance to practice preparing someone for a YFTM. Discuss techniques and ways to explain the process and gain buy-in with the larger group.

1. Charlie is 15 years old. He lives with his mother and two younger siblings. Charlie has been in and out of family court for the last two years. His first charge was for shoplifting. After he was adjudicated for it, he began to accumulate domestic violence charges. Charlie's mother claims that Charlie frequently yells at her and sometimes shoves her during arguments. He was finally referred to your program and is about to complete phase one of the program.

In your work as Charlie's case manager, you have learned that he is quiet and sullen until you figure out what he enjoys (playing basketball) and ask him about his behavior. He tells you that his mother often yells at him. He also says that for the last three years he has been responsible for taking care of his younger siblings in the afternoons and evenings while his mom works.

Charlie does not get in trouble at school for anything other than falling asleep in class or tardiness. Both offenses are regular occurrences. He manages to get by in school with Cs in most of his classes, but he seems disinterested in school. He would like to play basketball, but his afternoons and evenings are spent taking care of his little brother and sister.

In preparing Charlie's mother for the YFTM, you learn that she works 42 hours a week at Wal-Mart – even more when she can get overtime. When asked about Charlie's behavior, she states that he's been "bad" for as long as she can remember. She lists numerous things Charlie does wrong and how he annoys her. When she has been angry, it has been because of something Charlie has done to upset her. When questioned about Charlie's strengths, she is unable to name anything that qualifies, even with prompting.

How would you prepare Charlie's mother for the YFTM? Include how you would gain her buy-in.

2. Sherry is 16 years old. She lives with her grandparents and has sporadic contact with her mother. She has been involved with family court for the last two years. Her first charge was a status offense her grandparents filed after Sherry left for school and did not come home for two days without telling them where she was. Sherry's grandparents are happy to have her live with them. Without much prompting, they are able to name many of Sherry's strengths, including intelligence and leadership.

When it comes to needs, Sherry's grandparents are adamant that contact with her mother upsets Sherry and manages to undo any of the progress they make with her in counseling and in their relationship. Sherry's mother is an addict. Her bouts of sobriety never last more than three months. When Sherry's mother is sober, she comes around and makes numerous promises to Sherry. She always fails to deliver and disappears when she starts using again, upsetting Sherry and sending her into a tailspin.

Even after speaking at length with Sherry about her strengths and her needs, Sherry is still unable to name either. She is not looking forward to the YFTM. Sherry has attended numerous meetings in the past, both at school and in counseling, where she has been the center of attention as her faults were discussed extensively.

How would you get buy-in from Sherry for the YFTM process? How would you help her identify her strengths and make her feel comfortable about what is going to happen? How would you address her request that her mother – currently sober for two months – be included in the YFTM?

3. Jonathan is 15 years old. He has been involved in family court for the last two years for various status offenses. His parents have a very hard time connecting with Jonathan, mostly because his family is very needy. As a case manager, you often feel your time is spent equally between Jonathan and trying to meet the needs of his family. His mother has you on speed dial and feels free to call you whenever there is a problem with any member of the family. It's become clear to you that because Jonathan's family is so needy, they are unable to offer much support to him.

The most influential adult in Jonathan's life is his baseball coach. He has offered advice, kindness, rides, and other supports to Jonathan in the last few years. However, Jonathan's baseball coach ascribes to the old adage "spare the rod, spoil the child." As much as he cares about Jonathan, the baseball coach believes Jonathan needs to be punished for his bad behavior. He doesn't believe in therapy and has very little patience for responses to misbehavior outside of detention. But he thinks Jonathan is a "good kid" and agrees to participate in the YFTM. You, however, are cautious of what he will say.

How do you explain the YFTM process to Jonathan's baseball coach? How do you explain the concept of strengths and convince him that the YFTM is the proper response to Jonathan's misbehavior?

Interview Questions Template

For the youth

1. Have you heard of a Youth Family Team Meeting before?
2. What other service team meetings have you been to? What were those meetings like?
3. What do you think you are good at?
4. What other positive things have people said about you?
5. What is important to you?
6. What do you think you need from others? What do you need in order to improve? What do you need to feel better?
7. Who would you like to be at this meeting? Who do you think knows you and wants you to succeed?
8. Do you feel comfortable with [participant's name] being at the meeting? What do you think he or she will have to say? *Repeat question, mentioning each participant.*
9. Do you have any questions for me about the YFTM? Do you understand what the meeting will be about and how you will be involved?

For parents/guardians

1. Have you heard of a Youth Family Team Meeting before?
2. What other service team meetings have you been to? What were those meetings like?
3. What do you think your child is good at? What have other people said he or she is good at? What is important to your child?
4. What do you think is behind your child's behavior? Are there things about his or her background that I should know? How do you think we can help your child to improve?
5. Who would you like to be at this meeting? Who do you think knows your child well and wants him or her to succeed?
6. Do you feel comfortable with [participant's name] being at the meeting? What do you think he or she will have to say? Does he or she get along with your family and your child? *Repeat question, mentioning each participant.*
7. Do you have any questions for me about the YFTM? Do you understand what the meeting will be about and how you will be involved?

For service providers

1. Have you heard of a Youth Family Team Meeting before?
2. What other service team meetings have you been to with this family? Were those meetings helpful/effective?
3. What do you think this child is good at? What have other people said he or she is good at? What is important to this child?

4. What do you think is behind your child's behavior? Are there things about his or her background that I should know? How do you think we can help this child to improve?
5. Are there things I should know about this family?
6. Who would you like to be at this meeting? Who do you think knows this child well and wants him or her to succeed?
7. Do you feel comfortable with [participant's name] being at the meeting? What do you think they will have to say? Do they get along with this family and this child? *Repeat question, mentioning each participant.*
8. Do you have any questions for me about the YFTM? Do you understand what the meeting will be about and how you will be involved?

For other significant adults in the youth's life

1. Have you heard of a Youth Family Team Meeting before?
2. Have you been to other meetings with this family? What were those meetings like?
3. What do you think this child is good at? What positive things about this child have other people said? What is important to this child?
4. What do you think is behind this child's behavior? Are there things about his or her background that I should know? How do you think we can help this child to improve?
5. Who would you like to be at this meeting? Who do you think knows this child well and wants him or her to succeed?
6. Do you feel comfortable with [participant's name] being at the meeting? What do you think he or she will have to say? Do they get along with this family and this child? *Repeat question, mentioning each participant.*
7. Do you have any questions for me about the YFTM? Do you understand what the meeting will be about and how you will be involved?

YFTM Explanation Checklist

With participants

- Meet with parent/guardian
- Explain YFTM process to parent/guardian (identifying strengths, identifying needs, identifying services/supports)
- Make sure parent/guardian understands what we mean by strengths and needs
- Help the parent/guardian to think in terms of strengths by helping them to identify some of the youth's strengths
- Address any of the parent/guardian's concerns or questions about the process
- Ask the parent/guardian if they think anyone else should be included in the YFTM
- Get a copy of the mental health authority releases signed for each person the parent/guardian would like to include
- Leave a copy of the one-pager about the YFTM process
- Meet with the youth
- Explain the YFTM process to the youth (identifying strengths, identifying needs, identifying services/supports)
- Make sure the youth understands what we mean by strengths and needs
- Help the youth to think in terms of strengths by helping identify some of his or her own strengths
- Address any of the youth's concerns or questions about the process
- Tell the youth who the parent/guardian has suggested should be included in the YFTM. Ask the youth what he or she thinks
- Address any of the youth's concerns about including others
- Leave a copy of the one-pager about the YFTM process

Releases

- For each participant
- For each service provider
- Agency-required releases

Preparing the YFTM facilitator

Write a document including:

- Each person who will participate in YFTM
- Each person's relationship to the youth

- Each person's relationship to the parent/guardian
- Each person's relationship to the other participants
- Any relevant background on the person (This can include their history with family and youth, their perceived understanding of the process, their mood coming into the YFTM, their feelings about the youth's behavior and what this person believes is the appropriate way to address the misbehavior)
- The youth's perceived feelings going into the YFTM process (Apprehension? Mistrust of people in the room? Negative history with service team meetings?)

Juvenile Record File Checklist

This list is not exhaustive nor is everything in it required. Many forms will depend on how your agency keeps client records. It is important to have an accurate history of the client to adequately inform the facilitator.

- Information release form, signed
- Social history questionnaire/initial assessment
- Family assessment
- Mental health evaluation
- School records
- Risk assessment
- Report to YFTM facilitator

YFTM Preparation Checklist

- Identify YFTM participants
- Have youth, parents, and participants sign releases
- Provide YFTM information to participants
- Discuss strengths and needs with participants
- Write YFTM report for facilitator

Template Report to Facilitator

Name _____

Age _____

Family

This should include names and ages of parents/guardians, names and ages of any family members living in the home, a brief family history, divorces, deaths, significant relationships, any domestic violence or abuse, how the youth is perceived by parents and family, and any other pertinent information. This may include how the youth came to be involved with the agency if it involves the family.

Supports

This should include support people for both the family and the youth. This may include coaches, church family, extended family, or others. Describe how these people support the family (child care, monetarily, etc.)

Strengths

List and explain the youth's strengths you were able to identify during prep work with participants.

School

This includes the name of the school and the youth's grade level. It should also include any difficulties or strengths in school, how the youth performs in class, any discipline issues, specific teachers or administrators the youth has significant relationships with (good or bad). Also include the school names and grade levels of siblings.

Legal

This includes a history of any past charges or ongoing court involvement. It should include the charge and the circumstances (both reported details and details from family members and other individuals who have contact with the youth that differ from the report). This section is best listed in chronological order.

Mental Health

This should include any diagnoses and when evaluations were done. It should include close family members with mental health concerns that affect the youth, such as a sibling with bipolar disorder.

Substance Use

This should include substances the youth uses, as well as any substance abuse treatment programs the youth is or has attended. It should include the dates the youth attended the program.

Step 4: The YFTM

Template strengths, needs, services chart

Strengths	Needs	Services/Supports

Acknowledgments

The Southern Poverty Law Center would like to give special thanks to the people who contributed to this publication:

The Center for Public Representation (CPR)

Alabama Disabilities Advocacy Program (ADAP)

Dr. Marty Beyer

Author • Ebony Howard

Research and additional writing • Elizabeth Young

Editor • Jamie Kizzire

Design Director • Russell Estes

Designer • Sunny Paulk

Photographers • Steve Debenport/Getty Images (cover); Masterfile (page 4); Edward Badham (page 8);
Blake Little/Getty Images (page 13); Jose Luis Pelaez Inc/Blend Images (page 16)

This publication was made possible through a grant from the Public Welfare Foundation.